

FALSE ALARMS AND REAL DANGERS.

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—AN—

ORATION

—BY—

HON. GEORGE WILLARD

—AT—

VERMONTVILLE, MICHIGAN,

JULY 3d, 1875.





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MR. PRESIDENT AND FELLOW CITIZENS :

He that speaks on this birthday of the nation, finds it difficult to avoid the routine of patriotic commonplace. But in the presence of an intelligent and thoughtful population like the one represented in this assemblage, to pursue a line of discussion that is not practical and which has neither the merit of freshness nor of utility, would seem rather to cheapen than to honor the day we celebrate. That it is within the compass of my ability to meet this requirement, is more than I could venture to promise ; but your demand should be the measure of my willingness to make an effort. The memories and associations of the day speak with a more significant emphasis and with a grander eloquence than I can summon to my aid ; but their sublime inspiration I would invoke, that it may, at this time, fill our minds, elevate our conceptions, purify our motives and give clearness to our vision, that we may see and meet the imperative obligations laid upon us as citizens of this American Republic.

OUR FIRST CENTURY.

To-day, fellow citizens, we step upon the threshold of the year which is to close the first century of our history as a nation. That history, I need not say, has been an eventful one—eventful, whether we look at the momentous incidents which have marked our national career, or at the revolutions which have been witnessed among the other great communities of the earth. The Republic, from comparative obscurity among the nations, has become conspicuous by its achievement, and still more by the impression which men have of its destiny. From a feeble and derided infancy which promised a doubtful future to its friends, and afforded the expectation of sure triumph to its enemies, it has grown to a manhood which, in its strength and vigor, if it does not win universal favor, at least compels universal admiration.

PROMINENT FEATURES OF THE ERA.

Since our nation began, great changes have been wrought in the political aspect of the old world. The map of Europe has been

again and again reconstructed. States and kingdoms have exemplified the too common instability of human institutions and the insufficiency of the basis upon which political societies are too frequently founded. Still these changes and revolutions have not been such as to cause regret or to arouse distrust. The period which comprises our national record, has been the world's bright particular period of growth in material prosperity, in social enlightenment and in substantial civilization. Science and the arts have not merely advanced, but they have assumed new and unwonted theatres for the exhibition of their capabilities, and have so fully developed into new and higher forms of organized utility, that they are to be no longer recognized by their former features and outlines. Industry has secured a marvelous multiplication of the instruments required for the accomplishment of its results. Business has discovered far ampler and more remunerative fields for the display of its energies, and has extended its dominion by wholly novel and hitherto unused modes of conquest.

Thus, while the Republic enters upon the one hundredth year of its existence, with a conscious development of its own powers and resources, it finds that the outside world, in the meanwhile, has been far from remaining stationary. The growth of the nation's faculties and the development of its own interior political system, have been coincident with an altered phase of human society elsewhere. This growth of the Republic has of necessity involved the formation of new links of intercourse and the assumption of new responsibilities in its inevitable relation to a world which, in thought, in modes of action, in the boldness of its undertakings, in the reach and sweep of its enterprise, in its ambition for grand and successful achievement, in its steady measurement of the utility of theory by the results of practice, has been revolutionized since the memorable day on which our fathers staked their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor for liberty and independence, and, in the unselfishness of their devotion, opened a new chapter and fixed a new era in the history of mankind.

WORK OF THE PAST CENTURY—ORGANIZATION.

In the century now closing, the really great questions with which the nation has been required to grapple, have been those of organization. This work may, however, be now regarded as complete. The Republic is now established upon the foundations of sectional harmony and universal liberty. The chief causes which gave suspicion of its imperfection, have, fortunately, been removed. The

struggles of the last ten years have crowned our national temple with its finishing arch, and men may no longer say that here is a partially completed structure. The critics of other lands can no more exclaim, 'Here a nation began to build, but was unable to finish;' for they behold that from foundation stone to dome, nothing has been omitted that would render it a fitting abode of freedom; a place where all men may find citizenship, and may learn that citizenship also invariably implies fraternity.

The sources of sectional discord which, hidden or operative, have existed since the formation of the Union, have been eradicated. No root of sectional bitterness remains in fact, or can much longer remain in imagination. The animosities of the late war have been overwhelmed by the successive waves of patriotic aspiration and fraternal sentiment, which have swept over the land during the decade that has since elapsed; and now, in this centennial year of the Republic, in the mighty upswelling of the flood of union feeling in every section of the country, there comes the *fluctus decumanus*, as the Romans termed the tenth wave, which, with more volume and steadier force than all the rest, will bury beneath its whelming tide every obstacle to union and every disposition to prolong a strife which has no rational motive or even significance.

WORK OF THE NEXT CENTURY—DEVELOPEMENT.

But if the first century of our history has been the period of organization, we may so far lift the veil of the future as to enable us to predict that the century upon which we are next to enter will be the period of development. The completion of the structure will be followed by fitting it more fully, and in all its parts, for its destined use. Hence the national questions that now require our attention are not those which concern the rights of the citizen, but those which relate to the means for providing and diffusing the agencies of a common prosperity. They do not so much relate to the constitutional guarantees of State and individual equality—for these are settled—but to methods for developing our immense resources and to the device of policies which in securing to industry a profitable return, shall widely and impartially distribute the practical advantages to be gained from political association in a government like our own. The American people, in the future that is now upon them and within the limits of which they have begun to tread, must gird themselves no longer to solve the problems of political right, but the now far more imperative problems of political economy. For if the next century shall disclose a great strug-

gle in this country, as it may, that struggle will not have for its rallying summons, the cry for liberty, but the cry for bread.

PAST AND FUTURE DANGERS UNLIKE.

From this view of the nation's present posture, fellow citizens, the inference is plain that the dangers which have beset the Republic in the past are not to be apprehended in the future. Alarms originating in the period of organization will continue to be sounded even after the causes which gave rise to them have become obsolete. On the other hand, new and actual dangers which the nation, in its advancement to an untried experience, is called to encounter, may be wholly overlooked in the din and clamor aroused by fears founded in misapprehension and supported by sinister design. If I shall be successful in properly warning those that hear me not to permit these false alarms to divert attention from the real dangers that lie before us, I shall have accomplished what I chiefly desire in this address.

FORM OF GOVERNMENT NO CAUSE FOR ALARM.

The assured future of this great Republic is of such priceless value that it is no wonder that men make it the subject of apprehension. Prominent among the fallacious fears which, at one time or another, have gained currency, is the one suggested by our form of government.

The notion so prevalent in Europe that a popular government contains within itself the elements of its own dissolution, secures a much too ready acquiescence in our country. The remark is not infrequent here in the North but is still more trite in the South, that the nation needs a stronger government; and by stronger, is meant more conformed to the usages of monarchy, with the powers of the rulers enlarged, with less of responsibility to the citizen, and in brief, less popular and democratic. But where the people are intelligent and virtuous—and they will be virtuous where they are truly intelligent—the democratic form of rule is the strongest and the most enduring that can be devised. History yields no proof of the inherent weakness of a “government of the people, by the people and for the people,” but invariably shows that whenever Republics have been overborne by internal disaster, that disaster has arisen through a violation, or through a partial and incomplete application of republican principles.

If governments derive their powers from the consent of the governed, and if they are strong in proportion to the fulness of that consent, what form of government can be stronger than the one in

which that consent forms the exclusive basis upon which its maintenance and continuance are made to rest? But we need rely neither upon logical inference nor upon remote examples in proof of this position: for in the first century of our history—culminating, as it does, in the exhibition of a popular support more cordial and universal than the world has ever seen displayed after a similar contest—we have an instance that popular responsibility in the fabric of government, is not an element of weakness, but an element of strength. As in the Hebrew annals, republican Israel won seceding Benjamin back to the union, when monarchical Israel could not avoid permanent division in the subsequent civil strife, so in this nation the people have triumphed in an effort in which a monarch must have failed. Indeed so general is the conviction that the American people have both the motive and the ability to exclusively manage their own affairs for their own welfare, that we may dismiss all apprehension suggested by our form of government as a perfectly groundless alarm.

NOR EXTENSION OF POLITICAL PRIVILEGE.

The recent extension of political power and privilege to classes which have not hitherto enjoyed them is made the occasion for renewed fears concerning the stability of our institutions—fears, however, as baseless as any terror ever conceived in the extravagance of childless fancy. The public safety, so far from being endangered, is rendered more secure by the removal of all barriers of political distinction erected by the prejudice of race. To unjustly exclude any class of men from a share in shaping the rule under which they are to live, is to make them the enemies of the government instead of its friends. Their participation of privilege secures their allegiance, and the Republic is made stronger by enlarging the area of personal responsibility upon which it rests for support. Those who nurture a solicitude in regard to the policy of the nation in establishing equal civil rights and impartial suffrage, give a too ready welcome to an apprehension which must shortly disappear before the convincing proof of successful experiment.

NOR DIVERSITY OF POPULATION.

Nor does this extension derive increased cause for alarm from the fact that the nation is not a homogeneous people. The Republic is all the stronger by reason of the intertwining strands furnished by the varied races of which it is composed. The great mistake in the effort to give durability to national constitutions has been made in the omission to embrace all races and tribes under

one broad canopy of equal citizenship. The Athenian democracy confined itself to the limits of a favored race, and it could not survive the rejection of the very principle from which its life was derived. The Roman Republic placed itself in the inevitable current of a fatal destiny when it proposed arbitrary dominion, and not political incorporation, as the sign by which its conquests were gained. Unlike these governments, the American Republic adopts a policy which, from the imperative motive of self-interest, if from no other, must inevitably transform every human shoulder into a prop to sustain the constitution, and induce every citizen, of whatever ancestry or blood, to fly with alacrity to its defence.

Upon our shores have been gathered the representatives of nearly every nation of the old world, not alone of Europe, but of Africa and Asia. We have among us the fortitude, the endurance, the enterprise of the Saxon race; the inflexibility, determination and resolution of the Teutonic; the vivacity, sprightliness and generosity of the Celtic; while in some portions of the country, more especially at the extreme south, there is an admixture of the mobility, gayety and impulsiveness of the Latin race, derived by emigration from Southern Europe. To these we may add the qualities with which nature has endowed those who trace their origin from civilizations still more diverse, and who shall say that they, as well as the rest, do not contribute characteristics which shall be of service in maintaining this, our stronghold of universal freedom? The prejudices and interests of the one class will be counterbalanced by the prejudices and interests of another; and the erroneous views and predilections incident to the race characteristics or traditions of any one portion of the population will find a sufficient antidote and correction in the precisely contrary, but equally fallacious conclusions of another portion; so that in this wide extension of liberty and equal toleration, our political machinery will be endued with the power of self-adjustment, and its chances of perpetuity proportionately enhanced. Every cry which men's fears may raise against the political equality of race is beyond contradiction, fellow citizens, an entirely false alarm.

NOR EXTENT OF TERRITORY.

Another somewhat similar apprehension is that suggested by our wide extent of territory. Since our recent troubles were sectional, it is quite natural that public attention should be directed to a feature which has not unfrequently been the cause for the dismemberment and dissolution of empires. The functions of government, operating over a territory so vast, with many of its parts so remote

from the governing centre, are thought to be incapable of effecting their design, while diversity of interest on the part of the governed only adds to the intensity of the evil.

But it should be remembered that under the American constitution, the most important powers of government, the disposal of questions of the most vital interest, the determination and decision of subjects concerning which communities or individuals are apt to become involved in controversy, are left to State and local authorities; and only in a few justifiable exceptions clearly pointed out in the nation's supreme law, can be ever brought within the province of national administration. The responsibility of adjusting these questions being thus removed from the general government, there is no occasion for its exercise of those functions which distance impairs, or for incurring the jealousy and hostility engendered by diverse sectional interests.

Indeed, the late perilous contest through which the nation has passed, though a sectional one, did not spring either from the extent or the diversity of the domain embraced by the Republic. That contest may have been territorial in its occurrence, but was not territorial in its cause. It was produced by an irreconcilable diversity of institutions, not by any parallels of latitude or lines of longitude. But if territorial diversity did not cause the rebellion, it was territorial tenacity which prevented its success. The Mississippi river demanded an integrity of American territory through which its waters might pass to the sea, and thus the impelling force of popular sentiment, suggested by the idea of the national domain which embraces nearly everything truly valuable on this North American continent, enabled us to save for ourselves and our children, an inheritance of freedom which, through other causes, had been well nigh lost. They are false prophets, therefore, who would excite alarm from this beneficent circumstance which has but just now proved to be our salvation. Our diversity of soil and climate, our numerous lakes and rivers, with our railways and other channels of intercommunication, and all the varied agencies of commercial intercourse, interlocking the entire country in a perfectly indissoluble net-work of enduring ligatures, are all so many arguments for the preservation of the Union, and so many guarantees and sponsors for its perpetuity.

NOR INCREASE OF WEALTH.

The increase of wealth is another occasion of false alarm. There is a popular notion that the accumulation of capital endangers the national safety. Republics are supposed to be undermined by lux-

ury, and luxury is regarded as the necessary consequent of the production of wealth. But let me say, fellow citizens, that poverty is no protection to liberty, and that freedom and financial prosperity are invariably associated. Besides this, every dollar earned by the honest citizen is an additional pledge of his fealty to the government in securing to him the right to possess and enjoy what he has obtained ; so that loyalty gains an added strength from pecuniary investment. The outlay of the products of industry all over the land, increasing in our country from year to year, as gained from the farms, the workshops, the mines, the looms, the furnaces, and all the varied sources of our increasing wealth, are daily and hourly weaving those golden bands that bind this mighty nation into one united whole, and give a promise of its future in which no mere sentimental, croaking alarmist shall be able to shake our faith.

REAL DANGERS UNNOTICED.

But, fellow citizens, while the air is filled with these false alarms, and while evils wholly imaginary form the staple of political agitation, we should not too readily felicitate ourselves that the future pathway of the nation is wholly void of peril. Alarmists repeat the old warnings and endeavor to revive the distrusts and anxieties of a past period, but we may be assured that our dangers are of an entirely different sort. They are not the kind to excite popular attention or to awaken popular solicitude. They are neither striking in their aspect nor imposing in their menace, and may be classified among the things that come not by observation. Nevertheless they will soon be more obvious, and will develope into the most conspicuous objects within our political horizon.

THE SPECIAL DANGER OF THE FUTURE.

These dangers all bear relation to a possible result, to provide against which American statesmanship should summon its foresight and wisdom. The effort to organize and complete a government of equal liberty and impartial law, only found its final triumph after a four years' sectional contest, whose record was marked with desolation and traced in blood. But if another war shall shake this continent and put in jeopardy our free institutions, let me tell you, fellow citizens, that it will not be a war of sections ; it will not involve an array of the South against the North, or of the West against the East ; it will not arise from any difficulties growing out of sectional hostility or sectional prejudice ; but if the second century of the Republic shall find a serious interruption of domestic tranquillity, and shall open another page of carnage, it will be from

a cause of which even the most superficial observation cannot fail to give us a glimpse ; it will be from an evil with which we now see France forced to contend in a desperate effort for her self preservation, and which, in various phases in other lands, seeks to blot out some of the most valuable guarantees of individual right, to destroy the bulwarks which protect the individual possession of property, to overturn the foundations of individual liberty as secured by law, and, in brief, to subject personal freedom and personal acquisitions to the disposal of those who have resolved that their most expeditious way of obtaining what they need, is by rapine and force. Should war raise his wrinkled front and sound his dread alarms in our country, either in our day or in that of our children, it will be the offspring of that central evil of the future —the evil of Communism. The subordinate dangers that lead to this one great peril ought not to escape observation.

THE DANGER FROM PARTY PATRONAGE.

One subsidiary danger relates to administration. It consists in the threatened subversion of a distinctive principle of free government, and forces itself upon public notice in the prevalent method of making executive appointments.

It is an essential maxim of political wisdom that the three great departments of government, the Executive, the Legislative and the Judicial should be distinct. The duties of each should be discharged without interference from either of the others. But this maxim is disregarded. The members of the national legislature, by a vicious and dangerous usage, have intruded upon the prerogatives which the constitution expressly assigned to the Executive of the nation, and by assuming to recommend candidates, they virtually become the instruments through which official positions are secured. To say nothing of the evil of placing individual members of Congress and the heads of the several Executive departments and bureaus under an obligation for reciprocity of favors, and thus exposing them to the temptation of subordinating duty to personal interest, there is the still greater and more momentous hazard of placing the government under the control and dominion, not of the constitutional rulers acting under constitutional forms, but of that monstrous aggregation of irresponsibility which, in all countries, is too often developed under the form of party.

In our Republic, this evil is the greater, for the reason that party is here more potent than among European nations, since it controls, not alone the selection of officials in the legislative, but also in the executive branch of the government. In Great Britain,

only the members of the Legislature are elected ; the Executive head of the nation is not dependent upon party for his position. With us, both are elective, and more frequently than otherwise, owe their existence to the same partisan origin and support. The natural tendency, therefore, to a lack of independence, on the part of each, is sufficiently great without increased inducement. This lends additional weight to the caution of removing, so far as possible, the responsibility of making executive appointments, beyond the immediate and direct influence of party dictation, and, by consequence, beyond Congressional control. It is this consideration which leads to the demand for a thorough, practical reform of the civil service. The knowledge of an evil so injurious to honest and efficient administration, induces regret that the accomplishment of the reform should be deferred.

FROM CORRUPT ELECTIONS.

Intimately allied with this danger, both in origin and result, is the alarming increase of the use of money in our elections. Bribery and the open purchase of votes may be rare, but who does not know that even in our own commonwealth, where this evil has been comparatively unworthy of notice, money is becoming a much too frequent and efficient instrument in the political canvas. This agency may not yet have reached that measure of imperial dictation which, in the decline of Roman liberty, enabled the poet Ovid to declare, "*dat census honores,*" "it is the tax roll that confers honors," but there is enough of the danger visible to induce a free and intelligent people, who desire to maintain their liberties and preserve their institutions, to guard against an agent which fraud and ambition are only too ready to enlist in their service. Parties are essential to the national welfare. It requires effort to sustain and conduct them, but when a purchased ballot shall be their means of control, and official plunder shall be their aim, the country becomes endangered by a partyocracy which corrupts the entire government and hides every pillar of the constitution beneath its deadly and corroding incrustations. Should such a crisis come in the distant future, which, may heaven avert, the Republic will have advanced to the very brink of that dread abyss where it requires no remarkable foresight to perceive that there would be real danger.

FROM AN EVIL FINANCIAL SYSTEM.

The next peril which I shall mention, fellow citizens, is the financial one. The question whether a dollar shall be a dollar is one which the American people are required to determine, and the decision involves consequences of immense moment. Let us leave

out of the consideration all that relates to commercial credit, the violation of faith, the temptation furnished for the crime of national repudiation, the general bankruptcy and financial ruin that, sooner or later, must overtake a people which bids adieu to a sound financial basis, and content ourselves with a glance at the effect which a continued issue of government paper, to be used as money, must have upon our political system. Setting aside the evident violation of the constitution which such an issue implies, and also the fact that statesmen only resorted to it under the imperative necessities of war, this clothing the government with the power to make money by merely placing a stamp upon paper, is fraught with a peril whose magnitude is scarcely within the reach of human calculations.

An essential security to free government has been sought in the provision by which the power to impose taxes and to raise money has been restricted to the immediate representatives of the people. It was the transgression of this principle which sent Charles the First to the scaffold. British precedents combine with American constitutional law to put a jealous guard around that great bulwark of national safety and popular freedom. But of what avail are all these efforts of persistent care and anxious watchfulness, if the government, under the thousand quibbling pretexts which may always be summoned at will, may use its power to create obligations from blank paper, and to force from the people a loan by discretionary issues of currency? In opening the way for the assumption of this privilege, fellow citizens, you not only give to the Executive the control of the public purse, but you confer upon him the power to fill it with promises, for the fulfillment of which the nation itself is mortgaged. Should some future President aim at a permanent grasp upon the supreme power, he could use your promises to pay as a means to raise and support his legionaries for the overthrow of your liberties.

Nor is such an event wholly chimerical. We have only to imagine a condition, such as repudiation and bankruptcy must inevitably produce, an utter prostration of our industries, a general arrest of productive energy in all parts of the land, the discharge of laborers from all steady employment, and added to this, the peculiar disposition to dependence shown by certain classes of our population, both North and South, in order to realize that the clamor for bread may cooperate with executive ambition, and both together, by the agency of a depraved but convenient financial system, may wreck all the fair and fond hopes which men have

cherished in regard to the future destiny of the Republic. Such is the financial danger ; and a wise people should be warned in time and resist any and every policy which should make it even remotely possible. If ever our nation shall be called upon to encounter the Commune, irredeemable paper money will be revealed in close alliance with the calamity, if indeed it shall not prove to have been its prominent cause.

FROM COMMERCIAL OBSTRUCTIONS.

A commercial danger, though by no means so conspicuous, has recently seemed to menace the public welfare and to be an obstacle to general prosperity. Monopoly in this country has chiefly displayed its power in the control of our channels of internal commerce, and has created justifiable apprehensions that this control might become a permanent popular burden. The agricultural population of the Great West have been especially solicitous in regard to the paralysis which it, in some measure, brings upon those mighty industrial forces and energies which are so rapidly turning the vast interior of the continent into an area of the highest civilization. This evil is one, however, which the people will soon find a method to remove or modify. That this method will be the opening of great national highways, by rail or by water, for the transmission of the immense products of our industry, is an expectation too reasonable to be kept within the limits of mere conjecture ; and many of the most practical minds of the nation see in this plan the solution of a difficulty which, it must be acknowledged, has not yet found a remedy. Gigantic aggregations of capital have untold means of political corruption and national mischief, and warrant a prudent restriction of their movements without, however, repressing legitimate enterprise or invading constitutional rights. I need not say that to do this with discriminating wisdom is just now an imperative demand of statesmanship.

FROM DEPOPULARIZING EDUCATION.

Still another question is suggestive of a danger whose importance should be undervalued by no one who calls himself an American. By the side of purity of administration and financial integrity should stand the cause of popular education. When these three march abreast and are not allowed to falter in their step, whatever else may come, the nation is safe. Palsied, then, be the hand that, under any pretext or from any motive, religious or secular, would attempt to depopularize our American system of education, and to interrupt the usefulness or impair the efficiency of that indispensa-

ble instrument and safeguard of liberty furnished in our public schools. If sectarianism can force us to relinquish that cardinal article of our faith that causes us to cling to the common school as the sheet anchor of our national safety, it can blot from our memories Plymouth Rock, and every other remembrance that gives sacredness to our history. When we repudiate our ancestry and throw contempt upon American institutions, then, but not till then, will we abandon the idea that the perpetuity of the Republic and an unsectarian system of public education are inseparably identified.

THE REPUBLIC WILL TRIUMPH.

But, fellow citizens, these dangers of the future will all be successfully encountered and overcome. The questions incident to our national development will find a prosperous disposal in that popular intelligence, in that undeviating patriotism, in that auspicious foreboding of future destiny, which are so clearly the inheritance of the American people; and more than all, in that divine guidance and protection which have brought them safely through the troubles and difficulties of the period of organization. The watchword of our fathers, "*Qui transtulit, sustinet*," "He that has brought us through, will continue to sustain," is still the ineffaceable legend which the eye of patriotic faith descries upon our national banner. Our real perils, as one after the other they are met and conquered, will be transferred to the list of false alarms. The successive contests through which the Republic is called to pass, will only add to its strength and enlarge the scope of its beneficence. The strifes of the past have become our proudest triumphs: the strifes of the future will bring results which shall be an equal warrant for national pride.

CONCLUSION.

Let this, our unflinching faith in the final success of the Union, be to us a perpetual inspiration. This faith should stir within us a resolve that the grandeur of our citizenship in a Republic like this, shall never fail to secure from us a corresponding return of obligation. Our responsibility is measured by our privilege; and our sure hope that failure cannot attend our effort, should nerve us to an unremitting and conscientious performance of every patriotic and public duty.

When our descendants shall pass in review the deeds of the century on whose threshold we are about to step, let them be able to record that we entered upon it with a not less zeal for freedom and aspiration for fraternity, than that which glowed in the bosoms of the generation which laid the foundations of our national structure.

Let them record that we, with perfect union and with patriotic fervor, applied ourselves to whatever task the demands of the time required at our hands ; and let it be our praise and their pride that we rightly conceived and nobly performed our part in transmitting, with an added value, the inheritance of union and liberty which we have received. Thus may they, in their turn, as well as we, take up the glad refrain inspired by unwavering faith and hope, and shout onward to the coming centuries, with exultation and with confidence,

“GOD SAVE THE REPUBLIC.”



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